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Passing it Down – one Alaska Native Guardsman reflects on heritage and tradition

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — November is National American Indian Heritage month, also known as American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month. During this time, the U.S. Armed Services honors and celebrates the diverse cultures, traditions, and histories of America's indigenous people who have served their nation.

Sgt. Randell Andrew, an infantry team leader who works full-time as a facilities attendant for the Alaska Army National Guard in Bethel, is Yupik Eskimo and Athabascan Indian. Andrew is from Kwethluk, a remote village of about 700 residents, along the Lower Kuskokwim River less than 100 miles from Alaska's western coastline. Andrew has served in the National Guard since 2010.

Andrew explained that after enlisting, he was sent to Fort Benning, Ga., where he completed basic training, infantry school and the basic airborne course. Shortly upon returning to Alaska, he deployed to Afghanistan.

"About eight months after I completed my training, I deployed with my unit to Afghanistan back in 2011 and 2012," he said. "I joined the military to carry on my family tradition."

Andrew explained that both his grandfather and uncle served in the U.S. Army, and that his uncle had served in the Vietnam War.

"Growing up, they would tell me stories about their service," said Andrew. "They taught me how important it was to serve, and that it teaches us a better sense of discipline."

Andrew said that over time, his culture was dwindling away as the communities get smaller and the language and traditions are not passed down.

"Our ancestors have spoken that everything will change," said Andrews. "Our heritage has survived to this day, and we're still here, but our language and values are slowly fading away."

He explained that passing on the customs of his culture and continuing subsistence activities are vital in order to preserve the traditional lifestyle.

"I chose to grow up with my grandparents and uncles," Andrews said, "and they taught me the importance of our Native heritage and the importance of our subsistence way of life. I grew up hunting and fishing for a living, and now I'm passing that down to my son."

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **DVIDS link** includes selected full-resolution photos. (Accessible from military computers.)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/383974/passing-down-one-alaska-native-guardsmen-reflects-heritage-and-tradition>



Sgt. Randell Andrew, an infantry team leader that works fulltime as a facilities attendant for Joint Force Headquarters, Alaska Army National Guard in Bethel, poses for a photo at the Yukon Delta, winter 2019. Andrew is Yupik Eskimo and part Athabascan Indian, and is from Kwethluk in Western Alaska. Andrew has served in the AKARNG since 2010. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. Randell Andrew)



Former Alaska Territorial and National Guard member Sgt. 1st Class Samuel Jackson, left, and Alaska Army National Guardsman Sgt. Randell Andrew, both veterans from the western Alaska village of Kwethluk, pose for a picture in Kwethluk, Alaska, Sept. 22, 2017. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Sgt. Randell Andrew, an infantry team leader that works fulltime as a facilities attendant for the Alaska Army National Guard in Bethel, rides in a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter to the village of Kwethluk, Sept. 22, 2017. Andrew is from Kwethluk, a remote village of about 700 residents, along the Lower Kuskokwim River less than 100 miles from Alaska's western coastline. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead)